



Bill Moyers Essay: The Gun Lobby's Firepower

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Even as sadness turns to outrage over the Newtown tragedy, and powerful coalitions of leaders and celebrities speak out, those who produce, push, and promote guns continue unfazed and unabated. In this broadcast essay, Bill reports on how the NRA and gun merchants continue to strong-arm Congress and state legislatures into keeping any and all discussion of sensible gun control off the table.

BILL MOYERS: You may remember that we spoke about guns just a few days before Christmas, following the massacre in Newtown, Connecticut. So did Wayne LaPierre, CEO of the National Rifle Association.

WAYNE LAPIERRE: The only way, the only way to stop a monster from killing our kids is to be personally involved and invested in a plan of absolute protection. The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.

BILL MOYERS: Listening to LaPierre, my jaw dropped, and it occurred to me that he might well have plagiarized his vision of a wholly armed nation from another “man of the people” of forty years ago, the protagonist in the famous sit-com “All In the Family.” When a local TV station comes out in favor of gun control, Archie Bunker hits the airwaves with a rebuttal, which he watches at home with his family.

ARCHIE BUNKER in All In The Family: Good evening, everybody. This here is Archie Bunker of 704 Hauser Street, veteran of the big war, speaking on behalf of guns for everybody[...]

Now I want to talk about another thing that's on everybody's minds today, and that's your stick-ups and your skyjackings, which, if that were up to me, I could end the skyjackings tomorrow.

MICHAEL 'MEATHEAD' STIVIC in All In The Family: You could?

ARCHIE BUNKER in All In The Family: All you got to do is arm all your passengers. He ain't got no more moral superiority there, and he ain't going to dare to pull out no rod. And then your airlines, they wouldn't have to search the passengers on the ground no more, they just pass out the pistols at the beginning of the trip, and they just pick them up at the end! Case closed.

BILL MOYERS: Case closed. Except that Archie Bunker's a fictional character, created by Norman Lear, who knew better. Not Wayne LaPierre--he's real and he means business. Big business. Every time we have another of these mass slayings and speak of gun control, weapon sales go up. And guess what? As the journalist Lee Fang reports in *The Nation* magazine, "For every gun or package of ammunition sold at participating stores, a dollar is donated to the NRA."

So naturally, in a country where even life and death are measured by the profit margin, the cure for gun violence becomes, yes, more guns. Bigger profits. Never mind that just before LaPierre spoke, three people were shot and killed outside Altoona, Pennsylvania. Or that early on Christmas Eve morning, in Webster, New York, two volunteer firemen were called to the scene of a fire, then executed by an ex-con who allegedly set the blaze and murdered them with the same kind of assault rifle used against those school kids and their teachers in Newtown. Or that on New Year's Eve, in Sacramento, California, reportedly in a fight over a spilled drink, a 22-year-old opened fire in a bar, killing two and wounding two others. In fact, in just those few weeks since the Newtown slaughter of the innocent, more than 400 people have died from guns in America. That should boost the last quarter profit margins. So not surprising, the merchants of death are experiencing a happy new year.

We can't forget. We mustn't relent. We have to keep talking about this, because Wayne LaPierre and the NRA are insidious and powerful predators. Have you seen the reports in both the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and *The Washington Post* of how, 16 years ago, the NRA managed to get Congress to pull funding on gun violence studies at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention? And just two years ago, NRA henchmen even snuck a provision into the Affordable Care Act that prevents doctors from collecting information on their patients' gun use.

As Wayne LaPierre's brazen call for an armed populace makes clear, the odds don't favor common sense. There are always members of Congress willing to do the gun lobby's bidding as they profess their love of the second amendment and wait like hungry house pets for the next NRA campaign donation.

Every American a gun-toter is a frightening vision of our future. It doesn't have to be, if only we stop and think about where the Wayne LaPierre's would take us. That's what a fellow named Frank James did. He stopped, he thought, he changed directions. He's a pawn shop owner in Seminole, Florida, his youngest child is six. Frank James told a local ABC station he has decided to stop selling guns.

FRANK JAMES on ABC Local News: It'll probably cause my business to go out of business because it was a big part of it, but I just couldn't live with myself. I thought, wow, this is crazy. As a gun dealer myself, [REDACTED] like, yes, we need more gun control. Guns are getting into the wrong hands of the wrong people.

BILL MOYERS: He also said "[REDACTED] not going to be a part of it anymore. Conscience wins over making money." Thank you, Mr. James.
